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ABSTRACT

A "Reading Club" approach at Liberty University (Virginia) has been implemented to avoid the stigma that may be associated with elementary and junior high school students receiving remedial reading instruction. Students in grades K-8 from the local schools come to the university campus to be tutored in reading. Elementary education majors enrolled in the reading diagnosis and remediation course provide one-to-one tutoring. The sessions are referred to as a "Reading Club" rather than a reading clinic to avoid the medical/disabled connotations associated with a clinic. The club theme is carried out with contests and prizes. Enrichment is provided for those reading at or above grade level as well as for those reading below grade level. Although the Reading Club concept is utilized to promote a positive atmosphere, the tutoring sessions are serious business. The results of the Reading Club are sometimes immediate. Students who indicated a negative attitude toward reading during their first visit often return the next week with enthusiasm about what they have read. Parents report that performance and attitudes at school have improved as well. Students look forward to attending the Reading Club meeting each week and tutors also enjoy teaching with the positive approach. (RS)

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JOIN THE CLUB!

A NEW APPROACH TO THE TRADITIONAL READING CLINIC

Paper presented at the College Reading Association Conference

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JOIN THE CLUB!

A NEW APPROACH TO THE TRADITIONAL READING CLINIC

"There is little doubt that children who have suffered with reading disability over any sustained period of time are going to have serious questions about themselves and their abilities" (Abrams, 1983, p. 478). A wealth of research exists to corroborate Abrams' statement. However, McMillan and Gentile (1983, p. 484) conclude that unless the body of knowledge is organized and interpreted, future "investigators will continue to generate repetitive research that leads to more 'cataloging' of children's emotional and reading difficulties but fails to provide applicable solutions." The traditional clinical approach to reading remediation may exacerbate the accompanying emotional problems.

Quandt and Selznick (1984) describe three "counteractions" or defense mechanisms that are employed by students who are experiencing reading difficulties. The disabled readers may deny the importance of reading, hide or disguise their lack of reading ability, or claim that they really did not try to succeed. These mechanisms are known only too well by remedial teachers. Singling out the poor readers for special help in the classroom or reading clinic may serve to reinforce self-doubts about whether they are "normal." They may face taunting from their peers about going to the "dummy class." These social difficulties may contribute to emotional problems which block learning for reading disabled children (Manzo, 1987).

At Liberty University, a "Reading Club" approach has been

implemented to avoid the stigma that may be associated with receiving special help. Students in grades K-8 from the local schools come to the university campus to be tutored in reading. Elementary education majors enrolled in the reading diagnosis and remediation course provide one-to-one tutoring. The sessions are referred to as a "Reading Club" rather than a reading clinic in order to avoid the medical/disabled connotations associated with a clinic. The club theme is carried out with contests and prizes. Each semester a reading contest is conducted to stimulate independent reading. Clubbers are issued a Weekly Reading Record at the first session and are encouraged to read fifteen minutes each day in any material of their choice. At the second session, those who return the form with any amount of reading recorded receive a Reading Club membership card and a Reading Club bookmark, button, or pencil! At the last session the clubber selects prizes based on the total amount of time read throughout the semester.

A "Reading Wheel" or "Reading Puzzle" is also given to each clubber at the first session as an incentive to read a variety of materials. At each session the clubber colors the section(s) on the wheel or puzzle that correspond to the categories read that week (e.g. mystery, biography, poetry, etc.). Additional prizes are selected at the end of the semester for reading literature from each designated category.

Each semester there may be additional contests related to the season. March is Reading Month sponsored by the Piedmont Area

Reading Council, so in the spring semester clubbers participate in the Reading Club poster contest. The posters are displayed in the Teacher Education building and prizes are awarded. Parent take-homes are also distributed with tips for encouraging their children to read.

Another aspect of the positive approach employed in the Reading Club is that enrichment is provided for those reading at or above grade level as well as remediation for those reading below grade level. This avoids the stigma of "dummies only." The child who is frustrated by D's and F's on his report card does not mind attending Reading Club when his brother who makes all A's is a member too. At the same time, the brother is pleased to be included in the Club because it sounds like fun. All students can benefit from reading instruction. The child who is reading on grade level has specific skills that need to be strengthened and the advanced reader should be challenged to full potential (Wilson and Craig, 1989).

Although the Reading Club concept is utilized to promote a positive atmosphere, the tutoring sessions are serious business. An informal reading inventory is administered to determine appropriate levels of material for the clubber. The Prescriptive Reading Inventory is the basis for the skill focus of each language/literature centered session. Modality testing is used to indicate the most effective delivery system. Each one-hour session is divided into three activities: Vocabulary in Context using the

System 80, teacher-made games selected to strengthen a specific PRI skill, and application of the skill in the context of literature experience. Each tutor conducts an individual parent conference at the end of the semester. The approach is to "tackle the negative self-concept by giving the child success experiences, by praising and documenting progress, and by indicating . . . the child is worthy and capable" (Taylor, Harris & Pearson, 1988, p. 55).

The Reading Club approach addresses each of the three counteractions described by Quandt and Selznick (1984) while providing direct experiences for the preservice teachers. Children cease to deny the importance of reading as it is associated with the excitement generated by the incentives, but more importantly by the clubber/tutor relationships. Children are unable to hide most skill deficits during the basic testing and one-to-one interaction. Once the deficits are identified, success driven instruction minimizes or eliminates the deficits and at the same time builds a trust that affords the student the opportunity to "reveal additional areas of need." Finally, the clubber is positively encouraged with each evidence of effort such that "trying becomes a habit and an element of pride."

The results of the Reading Club approach are sometimes immediate. An interest inventory is administered in the first session. Clubbers who had indicated a negative attitude toward reading often return their reading record the next week with enthusiasm about what they have read. Parents report that

performance and attitudes at school have improved as well. Clubbers look forward to attending the Reading Club meeting each week and tutors also enjoy teaching with the positive approach.

One clubber demonstrated particularly strong indicators of emotional disturbance, reverting to infantile speech patterns and expressing a level of hostility toward school that was surprising at such a young age. The child had been considered by his school for special education placement. After one year in the Reading Club, occurrences of infantile speech and hostility have decreased and the child is functioning with peers in the regular classroom. A second clubber, home schooled because of his inability to separate from his adoptive mother in any situation outside the home, became an independent reader who now recommends to his mother that she just "drop him off."

Join the club! The Reading Club approach avoids the stigma of receiving special help, meets the needs of readers at all levels, and adds incentives for reading. The results are beneficial for children, parents, and tutors. The approach can be used to provide positive remediation in a clinical or classroom situation.

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